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COLORADO POLITICAL SCIENCE REVIEW

About the Colorado Political Science Review

The Colorado Political Science Review (CPSR) is a student-written and student-edited journal bringing political science perspectives to important issues of the day. The opinions and perspectives in the *CPSR* are those of the individual authors. We seek to generate thoughtful discussion and analysis rooted in social science theory and supported by research and data. The *CPSR* is housed in the Political Science Department at the University of Colorado Boulder and is supported by the American Politics Research Lab and the LeRoy Keller Center for the Study of the First Amendment.



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Fragmentation to Coordination: Zambia and the Rise of the G20 Common Framework

4/24/2026 • By Jackson Deville

In recent years, sovereign debt crises in developing countries have become more complex as countries are no longer just borrowing from a single institution, but from several sources, including private bondholders, China, other states, and international financial markets. This has resulted in a fragmented creditor system that makes restructuring repayments for developing countries difficult. When the government was suddenly unable to keep up with its payment schedule due to falling copper prices and the pandemic, Zambia quickly entered a crisis. In 2020, Zambia became the first African country to default during the pandemic. Since Zambia's debt system was so fragmented, older institutions like the Paris Club and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were not equipped to facilitate the level of coordination required to address this crisis. This resulted in Zambia becoming one of the first major cases to be taken on under the G20 Common Framework. The G20 Common Framework is an international initiative designed to help low-income countries restructure unsustainable debt in a coordinated way with both traditional and new creditors. This framework was built to increase cooperation between lenders, and in this case brought together Western countries, China, and private creditors to facilitate a restructuring of Zambia's debt in the wake of their default. Zambia's case shows how the G20 Common Framework improves debt restructuring by coordinating fragmented creditors, marking an important shift in how sovereign debt crises are managed.

Zambia's debt crisis emerged from several factors, including extensive infrastructure borrowing throughout the 2010s, international loans, and over-dependency on its copper economy. Zambia's copper accounts for over 70% of its exports, thus creating an economic vulnerability to fluctuations in copper prices (World Bank). Should the price of copper fall, the Zambian economy will follow suit. Zambia also received almost \$3 billion in Eurobonds from 2012 to 2015 (Gelpert, 2023). Following the 2008 fiscal crisis, interest rates were low, and creditors saw Zambia's copper market as strong and a stable investment. Zambia wanted to borrow money directly from financial markets instead of the IMF or World Bank, so it could retain a greater degree of sovereignty. However, since the bonds were in U.S. dollars, should the Zambian currency, the Kwacha, weaken, repayment will become much more expensive. Further, the interest rates on these loans were much higher than IMF loans at 8-9%. Since they had fixed repayment deadlines, Zambia was forced into a crisis due to COVID and falling copper prices, as it no longer had the revenue to pay. The situation is further complicated by the fact that they are in debt to private bondholders, whereas the IMF would be much more likely to restructure, private bondholders are profit-driven and have little incentive to restructure. Additionally, throughout the 2010s, Zambia borrowed heavily from Chinese lenders to develop massive infrastructure projects (Hsiang, 2023). By 2022, Zambian public debt was over \$21 billion (IMF).



The resulting restructuring process of Zambia's debt was a landmark case that resulted in China, private creditors, and the IMF cooperating under the G20 Common Framework. The G20 Common Framework was created in November 2020 during the COVID shutdown. This framework was designed to assist developing countries in restructuring unsustainable debt by coordinating between Western governments, China, and private creditors. In 2022, the IMF approved a \$1.3 billion extended credit facility to Zambia (IMF). However, it came with conditions that Zambia works to reduce budget deficits, cut subsidies, and increase fiscal transparency. In 2023, the creditor committee, chaired by France and China, agreed to restructure around \$6.3 billion of Zambia's debt. Private creditors negotiated separately, where around \$3 billion in Eurobonds were restructured. Most importantly, this restructuring included repayments based on copper price performance. Private creditors took longer to negotiate because they wanted the public institutions and countries, such as the IMF and China, to take losses before they did. Despite these challenges, negotiations were successful under the G20 framework and resulted in a restructuring of Zambian debt. Overall, the restructuring process of Zambia's debt represents a landmark moment in international fiscal cooperation between sovereign states and private actors.

As of today, Zambia's debt crisis has somewhat stabilized. Despite this, long-term projections show that the development of the country is still severely stunted and constrained by unstable fiscal conditions, particularly the fluctuating price of copper. Zambia was able to exit its formal default after prolonged restructuring agreements with Western countries, China, and private creditors. The IMF has now classified the Zambian debt as sustainable, but still high risk. This crisis exposed the vulnerabilities of resource-dependent economies, where external shocks can quickly translate into severe fiscal instability. Ultimately, Zambia's case highlights the potential of the G20 Common Framework to facilitate recovery, signaling an important and evolving tool for managing global debt crises.

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State-Level Criminal Justice Reform: How Colorado Legislatures Shape Public Safety Policy

4/24/2026 • By **Paige Javor**

Research Question

How do state legislatures shape criminal justice policy outcomes, and what institutional factors influence reform?

Current Considerations

Spend enough time around a state capitol and one lesson becomes obvious: the biggest criminal justice battles are not always the loudest ones. Headlines usually focus on whether lawmakers are being “tough” or “soft” on crime. Still, many of the most consequential choices happen in appropriations bills, oversight hearings, sunset reviews, and reporting requirements. This matters because most crimes fall under state jurisdiction, and state legislatures are the institutions that define crimes, set procedures, allocate money, and oversee many of the agencies that serve victims and investigate offenders. National research on criminal justice reform makes a similar point. Better data can change how lawmakers make decisions, stronger legislatures can induce greater transparency from agencies, and better-resourced legislatures are more capable of tailoring reforms to their own states rather than copying policy language wholesale (NCSL 2026; NCSL/Justice Counts 2022; Cook et al. 2023; Jansa, Hansen, and Gray 2018).

Colorado offers a particularly revealing case study because its recent public safety debates have centered not only on punishment, but also on investigative capacity. After the 2023 discovery that a former Colorado Bureau of Investigation scientist had allegedly manipulated data in roughly 10,800 DNA cases, the state faced a major credibility and capacity problem. According to CBI, the sexual assault kit backlog was about 1,400 cases by February 2025 and turnaround times exceeded 500 days. The State Auditor later reported that in 2024, approximately half of CBI’s DNA analysts’ lab time was spent reviewing the former scientist’s cases, diverting staff from active testing. What began as a forensic crisis quickly became a legislative question: Who would fund the fix, how would the public know whether the fix was working, and what standards should govern the system going forward (Colorado Bureau of Investigation 2025; Colorado Office of the State Auditor 2026).

The first answer came through the budget law. Senate Bill 25-170 required CBI to spend \$3 million in specifically appropriated money on backlogged DNA evidence, sexual assault kit tests, and DNA retesting tied to the misconduct review. The law also authorized the use of external laboratories, required a public dashboard with updates at least every 30 days, and mandated monthly reports to the General Assembly through June 2026. Just as important, this was not framed as a purely partisan measure. The bill’s prime sponsors included Democratic Senator Judy Amabile and Republican Senator Barbara Kirkmeyer, and the bill passed the Senate 33-0 and the House 60-0. In other words,

Colorado lawmakers treated backlogged evidence as an institutional failure that required both money and measurable accountability, not just campaign rhetoric (Colorado General Assembly 2025a; Legislative Council Staff 2025).

That legislative response shows why budgets are themselves a form of criminal justice policy. A state legislature does not need to rewrite the criminal code to change case outcomes. It can decide whether evidence is outsourced, whether staffing data are public, whether turnaround times are visible to survivors and detectives, and whether agency promises are tied to statutory reporting. In Colorado's case, those choices appear to have mattered. The State Auditor found that by December 2025, the sexual assault DNA backlog had fallen from 1,462 cases to 629, while the total DNA backlog fell from 2,448 cases to 1,459. The projected date for reaching a 90-day turnaround time for sexual assault cases moved from April 2027 to September 2026. Progress was incomplete, since the average turnaround time for sexual assault cases was still 190 days as of January 2026, but the direction of change was unmistakable (Colorado Office of the State Auditor 2026; Colorado Bureau of Investigation 2026a).

The second answer came through institutional redesign. Senate Bill 25-304 did not simply add more money to the system. It changed the structure of oversight and victim communication. The act created the Colorado Sexual Assault Forensic Medical Evidence Review Board in the Department of Law, with the attorney general as chair and at least 15 members drawn from relevant agencies and stakeholders. It also required law enforcement agencies to notify victims every 90 days when forensic medical evidence DNA analysis had not yet been received, expanded public reporting requirements, and set a new expectation that accredited crime laboratories should endeavor to analyze forensic medical evidence within 60 days. The bill also appropriated General Fund money to the Department of Law to implement the new structure. This is legislating in a different mode. Rather than focusing on punishment after conviction, it focuses on the chain of response before a case ever reaches trial (Colorado General Assembly 2025b; Legislative Council Staff 2025; Colorado Office of the State Auditor 2026).

The 60-day benchmark in SB25-304 is especially important because it illustrates how legislatures can reset agency priorities through statute. The State Auditor notes that since 2013, Colorado's benchmark for sexual assault kit testing had effectively been six months, subject to laboratory resources. SB25-304 sharply reduced that timeline to 60 days, while also requiring expanded average turnaround-time reporting. On paper, that is a simple statutory amendment. In practice, it changes how agencies are judged, what backlogs count as politically tolerable, and what victims can reasonably expect from the state. This aligns with national work on data-driven criminal justice reform, which argues that legislatures shape policy most effectively when they can require timely, comparable performance data rather than relying on anecdote or panic (Colorado Office of the State Auditor 2026; NCSL/Justice Counts 2022).

Colorado's Cold Case Task Force shows a third way legislatures shape public safety policy: preserving institutions long enough for expertise and coordination to accumulate. According to CBI, legislation in 2007 created the Cold Case Team, the Cold Case Task Force, and the Cold Case Database. CBI also reports that funding received in 2022 allowed it to establish a full-time Cold Case Team with four agents, two analysts, a forensic investigative genetic genealogy analyst, a supervisor, and embedded forensic scientists. The unit's database covers unresolved homicide cases, long-term missing persons, and unidentified remains cases dating back to 1970. This is easy to overlook in broader debates about crime, but cold case work depends on continuity, information-sharing, and specialized personnel, all

of which are created through state policy choices rather than local improvisation alone (Colorado Bureau of Investigation 2026b).

The legislature has repeatedly protected that continuity. Senate Bill 19-163 continued the Cold Case Task Force until 2026, and it did so with overwhelming support, passing the Senate 32-0 and the House 62-1. The bill's fiscal materials described a task force that meets at least four times each year and brings together representatives from public safety, the Department of Law, sheriffs, police, district attorneys, victim advocates, victims' families, and forensic pathology. More recently, the Department of Regulatory Agencies' 2025 sunset review recommended continuing the task force because it provides subject matter expertise to CBI and local law enforcement agencies across the state. This is a classic example of how legislatures do more than create programs. Through the sunset process, they periodically decide which institutions remain worthy of state support and which ones disappear (Colorado General Assembly 2019; Legislative Council Staff 2019; DORA 2025).

Taken together, Colorado's recent reforms suggest that state-level criminal justice policy is shaped by at least four institutional factors. First, crises create openings. The DNA backlog became politically actionable once the scale of the problem and the operational consequences were visible. Second, legislatures need usable information. Dashboards, mandated reports, and audit findings converted a vague failure into quantifiable metrics. Third, reform is more durable when it is interagency rather than symbolic. Colorado's review board and task force deliberately knit together investigators, prosecutors, victim advocates, and executive agencies. Fourth, legislative capacity matters. Research on state politics finds that stronger legislatures can induce greater transparency from agencies, and that legislatures with more resources are better able to adapt policy ideas to their own needs. Colorado's response fits that pattern because lawmakers did not just copy a national talking point about public safety. They converted a budget footnote, a testing crisis, and a sunset review into state-specific institutions and reporting rules (Cook et al. 2023; Jansa, Hansen, and Gray 2018; Colorado General Assembly 2025a; Colorado General Assembly 2025b).

Conclusion

The broader lesson is that public safety policy is not only about what happens after guilt is proven. It is also about whether rape kits are tested before cases go cold, whether survivors are kept informed, whether old homicide files have a standing statewide forum for review, and whether the public can see whether reform promises are being met. Colorado's legislature has not solved every problem. As of early 2026, turnaround times remained well above the new 60-day goal, and no statute can guarantee that every cold case will be solved. But the Colorado case does show, clearly, that state legislatures shape criminal justice outcomes through money, monitoring, deadlines, and institutional continuity. In that sense, the legislature is not just reacting to public safety policy. It is one of the central places where public safety policy is made.

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The Decline of Political Discourse in the Digital Age

4/24/2026 • By Rylie Jones

It's no secret that social media is changing the way we communicate with our politicians. From the official Democrats account on TikTok posting Zohran Mamdani mukbangs to President Trump tweeting and calling Kim Jong-un short and fat, political communication via social media has become increasingly widespread and unserious (Democrats on TikTok 2026.; Donald J. Trump [@realDonaldTrump] 2017). Historically, the most common form of nationwide addresses were the annual State of the Union addresses, weekly addresses (until the Obama administration ended them), and Prime Time addresses held in times of crisis (US House of Representatives 2026.). Now, between the top 10% most active Republican and Democrat representatives, over 200 tweets are made monthly to communicate with constituents (Mitchell 2020). Although the humorous nature and easy access to political communication gives people the opportunity to be more involved in politics than ever, it comes at a cost.

One major cost of social media being the main platform for political communication is the inability to discern real from false information due to declining media literacy. Because anyone can post on social media, finding reliable information becomes difficult, specifically when political figures are using social media as a campaign platform. Media literacy is the ability to analyze and evaluate information found in any type of communication (Rios 2024). With an abundant amount of information and little way to tell if something is real, people tend to have "some distrust [in] anything that doesn't align with our current beliefs" (Rios 2024). This worsens political echo chambers and leaves people confused, especially when the information that people can't decipher is coming straight from the accounts of our in-office officials.

Along with decreasing media literacy is an increase in political echo chambers. Political echo chambers come from social media algorithms, which show you the content you interact with the most; therefore, strengthening existing beliefs you hold without showing another side (Rios 2024). When political figures are the main actors communicating through social media, echo chambers show your favored party over and over, making their opinion the only opinion you can easily access, and making opposing information seem false. This has been extremely apparent with the current war in Iran. An account on X called "Commentary Donald J. Trump Posts from Truth Social" is an account that reposts President Trump's posts from his platform Truth Social for X users. This account shared various tweets saying "Iran is panicking now" and time is running out for Iran while Democrat supporters on TikTok claim all Republicans voted against the war (Commentary Donald J. Trump Posts From Truth Social [@TrumpDailyPosts] 2026; Democrats [@TheDemocrats] 2026). Because these are both coming from official accounts, people are inclined to believe the side they are most exposed to.

Finally, the unseriousness of social media as a main communication platform from our politicians is the biggest change from previous methods. With former types of nationwide addresses,



communication was formal and rather serious. Now, democrats post to X commenting “Ugly ass truck” on a picture of President Trump next to a Cyber Truck and President Trump posts AI videos to TikTok of himself dropping either mud or feces on No Kings protestors (Democrats (@TheDemocrats) / X 2025; Trump Posts AI Video Amid ‘No Kings’ Protests 2025). This stark change from formal communication to memes and performative content is deeply affecting voters and polarization.

With name-calling and online threats becoming our main form of communication from people in office, voters become stuck to their sides and unwilling to compromise. Instead of listening to alternative beliefs about social or political issues, Americans now take to social media to gloat and insult opponents (Halpin 2024). The divides between those who know about politics and those who don’t, Republicans and Democrats, and Americans and those outside the U.S. are deepening. People are becoming more extreme on each side and leaving little room for agreement across party lines. Not only has the way politicians speak changed, but the way citizens engage in politics altogether is changing. Without greater accountability for both politicians and voters, or improved media literacy, the consequences of social media threaten to change the way our democracy works altogether. A system that is dependent on uninformed citizens and unserious leaders challenges the processes and people we trust to take care of our country. Ultimately, the challenge we face as Americans is not to solely adapt to new forms of communication, but instead to ensure they strengthen, rather than undermine, the processes they now influence so heavily.

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Abusers in Office: The Mechanisms that Give the Accused a Place in Politics

4/24/2026 • By **Kate Huntington**

America is a land of opportunity where the poor can become rich, the voiceless can speak out, and the abusers can rise to the highest political office in the country. Today, at least 147 lawmakers across 44 states have been accused of some sort of sexual harassment, assault, or misconduct, including the President of the United States, pointing to a far too pervasive issue within the U.S. political system: abusers in office (Volmert et al., 2025). It is a pattern sustained by partisan bias, weak punishment, elite networks, and culture—but it is not by any means unchangeable.

History

Sex scandals in politics are a tale as old as time. Hamilton and Cleveland, for instance, faced scrutiny for alleged extramarital affairs (Wills, 2016). In more recent history, allegations against political figures like Clinton and H.W. Bush have gone beyond infidelity to claims of sexual misconduct. Nevertheless, these scandals, infidelity, and misconduct alike, have not amounted to much of anything but a mere headline for the tabloids. Rather than leading to accountability and institutional change, these incidents are brushed under the rug as just another political controversy that will be forgotten once the next one arises.

Partisan Bias

The perceived truth of these allegations is often not a measure of credibility or evidence, but is largely correlated with the alleged perpetrator's party identification. Believing a member of an out-party committed such a crude act is easy. It just reaffirms what partisans already believe: members of the opposite party are inherently less moral than members of their own (Klar & McCoy, 2019). This traces back to the concept of partisan motivated reasoning, a phenomenon describing how individuals interpret information through the lens of their party identification, often clouding judgment (Bolsen et al., 2013).

The 2020 presidential election hosted a race between two politicians with sexual misconduct allegations, with some voters describing that they were forced to pick “the lesser of two evils”. In 2020, Joe Biden was accused of sexually assaulting a Senate aide in 1993, and President Donald Trump has faced over 20 allegations of sexual misconduct. When asked about the legitimacy of the accusations against Biden, 14% of Democrats said they were credible, compared to 55% of Republicans, a clear and large margin. Meanwhile, 70% of Democrats and 14% of Republicans found Trump's allegations to be valid (Clarke et al., 2021).

Studies have also found that higher levels of party pride are positively correlated with more frequent instances of victim blaming (*New Research*, 2021). When a Quinnipiac poll asked Virginians if they



would call for the resignation of an elected official following accusations of sexual harassment or assault by multiple individuals, 55% of Democrats and 39% of Republicans responded yes. But when asked about the rape allegations surrounding Virginia's then Democratic Lieutenant Governor, Justin Fairfax, 52% of Republicans were in favor of his resignation, but the number for Democrats had dwindled to 24%, exemplifying how moral principle shifts based on party allegiance (Price, 2021).

Weak Punishment

Some cite their continued support for those accused of abuse as simply an adherence to the “innocent until proven guilty” rationale. But many of these accused individuals never even face a jury, oftentimes escaping prosecution entirely. Does that mean it is still morally just to disregard these allegations, presuming innocence when voting?

Former New York governor Andrew Cuomo was accused of groping an aide in the Executive Mansion in 2020. Cuomo denied this allegation, and an investigation ensued, but insufficient evidence was found to prosecute him, despite the Albany County DA describing the aide's claim to be “credible” (Villeneuve & Hill, 2022). In 2021, the New York Office of the Attorney General published a 168-page report into the claims of 11 women against Cuomo, concluding that “the Governor engaged in conduct constituting sexual harassment under federal and New York State law” (Clark et al., 2021).

While Cuomo faced no criminal convictions in these cases, accountability was pursued in an alternative way—through the people. After the OAG published the report, Cuomo faced considerable backlash from his constituents and fellow policymakers, pressuring his resignation. “I don't recall doing it, but if she said I did it, I believe her”, Cuomo expressed (Lenthang, 2021). Yet, despite it all, just years later, Cuomo embarked on his bid for NYC mayor because in America, misconduct allegations are nothing but a minor setback in seeking office.

Elite Networks

When political power is reinforced by elite connections, accountability is much harder to achieve. Sociologist C. Wright Mills offered a framework describing how the “power elite” can operate as a network to expand its own interests, undermining the integrity of democracy (Berquist, 2024). The Epstein files have played a significant role in revealing these elite networks. While not being a political figure himself, Epstein's relationship to those in office shielded him from accountability. Epstein's 2008 charges, which resulted in a generous “sweetheart” plea deal extended by former US Attorney and Labor Secretary Alex Acosta, gave a glimpse into the type of favor-trading that characterizes these networks. The plea was the only non-prosecution agreement Acosta offered during his time as a U.S. Attorney, raising concerns about the transparency of the negotiations (*The U. S. House Committee on Oversight*, 2025). As a result, Epstein was let off with a lenient work-release sentence, only to be rearrested 10 years later on charges related to sex trafficking. After Epstein's 2019 arrest, Acosta, who had transitioned to President Trump's labor secretary, experienced hefty backlash for the plea deal, leading to his resignation from the role (Rascoe, 2019).

Elite connections interfere with the very institutions meant to uphold justice. This is true even at the very highest level—the Supreme Court. Following Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh's initial confirmation hearings, accusations from three women alleging misconduct during Kavanaugh's high school and college years came to light (The Washington Post, 2018). In September of 2018, Kavanaugh and his first accuser, Christine Blasey Ford, both testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee. Afterwards, a supplemental background investigation proceeded. Democratic senator

Sheldon Whitehouse examined this investigation, claiming it was tainted by the Trump administration. The FBI neglected to pursue corroborating evidence and failed to scope out any of the tips from their public tipline, Whitehouse claimed (“Whitehouse Unveils Report Examining Failures of Supplemental Background Investigation of Justice Brett Kavanaugh,” 2024). Kavanaugh was later sworn in.

Culture

Behind each of these mechanisms is an American culture reinforcing them. During Kavanaugh’s hearings, Lindsey Graham posed the question: “Would you say you’ve been through hell?” To which Kavanaugh responded: “I’ve been through hell and then some”, reframing him as a victim of the investigation.

His allies helped perpetuate the narrative that frequently protects so many abusers from the consequences of their actions: the promise of a good future (Pareene, 2019). Modern misogyny constantly refashions female victims as the villains and their abusers as the innocent whose prospects are being ruined by the accusations. The Clinton scandal demonstrates this phenomenon. After lying under oath about his inappropriate sexual relations with White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, Clinton’s approval rating was 10 points higher on January 26, 1998 than it was before the scandal broke. And even after the House voted to impeach him, his approval rating still lingered at a solid 71% (DeSilver, 2019). Despite being a victim of the most powerful person in the U.S., Lewinsky was relentlessly ridiculed and slut-shamed by the American public, with only 12% of Americans viewing her favorably (Friedman, 2021).

In America, sexual assault and misconduct allegations do not bar you from success, wealth, power, and political office. Our culture is still stuck in the outdated “boys will be boys” mentality. Society trivializes their behavior, excusing abuse and harassment on the grounds that it is no fault but that of their natural inclinations.

Nevertheless, the people still have the force to hold their legislators accountable. The recent allegations against democratic representative Eric Swalwell are the latest continuation of this pattern. His resignation, like that of the others mentioned in this essay, points to a critical truth—while the problem persists, one thing remains the same: those in power will always answer to the people.

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ICE to Income: How Increased Enforcement is “Freezing” Our Economy

4/24/2026 • By Ainsley Ryan

Introduction

On July 4th, 2025, Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) was given \$75 billion under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), making history as the largest funded law enforcement agency in the U.S. The intention of this massive funding was to allow the Trump Administration to conduct the largest mass deportation campaign in history. Based on this alone, the administration assumed such a hefty investment would pay off in the long-run, benefitting many areas of the structure of the United States. With mass media attention, intense protests across the country, and dozens of criticisms coming from governmental organizations in DC, it's easy to assume such procedures have been nothing but successful.

However, what if we are not hearing the full story? Well, one thing the headlines are not encompassing is this: businesses are suffering. Their employees aren't showing up to work in fear of arrest. Manual labor can't happen because employees who are being questioned with undocumented status are disappearing from the industry. Entry-level jobs that usually require specific skills and physical exertion are not receiving the employment needed to continue. With companies attempting to continue functionality in lieu of ICE, what is happening to America's economy, and is our administration noticing the effects it may be causing? In response to this inquiry, I will be identifying how the increased intensity of ICE's current immigration enforcement has led to an inverse correlation in the United States' GDP and economic stability.

Economic Consequences

Examining a modern issue with constitutional equivalence requires some historical points for reference. Undocumented status became the center of debate in the late 19th to early 20th centuries, as the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), the Johnston-Reed Act (1924), and the Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986), were all enacted in response to labor demand, regional conflict and quota restrictions. However, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, published by Mae M. Ngai, reminds us that with the legal implementations of alienation and creating immigration laws, “the government can only resolve the situation via the legalization of their status” (Ngai, 2014). Therefore, we must expect the reconstruction of enforcement systems of labor markets. We are beginning to see the shift in enforcement systems, but the shift in labor markets is not going as noticed.

As neglected as this is, it is still starting to cause large-scale issues. Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy has observed that more than 8 million undocumented immigrants are currently working in the U.S in fields such as construction, agriculture, hospitality, etc. In that sense, they could predict that mass deportations would not open these positions up, but instead lead to 44,000 fewer jobs for



U.S-born workers, ultimately causing a 2.6% to 6.2% decrease in GDP over the next decade (Payan & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2025). With the potential of lower tax income, inflated prices, and the destruction of key sectors, increased ICE enforcement could be wreaking more havoc than what the Trump administration recognizes. Plus, even though the GOP has already dismantled many governmental organizations due to budget cuts, since immigrants make up the highest paying tax bracket, we could see a collapse of government programs such as Social Security and Medicare. Immigrants carry a “multiplier effect” with them, according to *JEC Democrats*, that workers in these sectors create even more jobs (Joint Economic Committee Democrats, 2024). In turn, this is what leads to such a significant loss in the job market and in turn, our country’s Gross Domestic Product.

This is recognized through national data, but researching local effects also helps us understand how the economic effects are individually affecting people. A strong example of a city who has taken the biggest burden to this change has been the Twin Cities in Saint Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota. Drawing emotional stories from one-on-one stories, *The New York Times* captures how the economic impacts are causing many structure changes: Worker disappearances, business leaders staying silent, and steep revenue declines, the Twin cities are facing the “the most visible economic pain of all urban centers” across the US Due to the Immigration Customs Enforcement (The New York Times, 2026). If these harsh changes from the intensity of ICE are being noticed both locally and nationally, studies need to be conducted in order to measure just how impactful the economic change is.

Case Study

It must be noted that not all data has been released in regard to the GDP as of April of 2026, and therefore, observing and utilizing methods that notice trends, not significant changes, can help us predict the economic effects of ICE. So, by cross-tabulating, or conducting a controlled comparison, setting data on ICE arrests, detentions, and deportations side by side with quarterly GDP change, we can generate effective results.

The Guardian has measured trends in ICE by month from October 2024 to early February 2026, additionally noting where the administration enacted the OBBBA. The bar graph reached its peak from October 2025 to January 2026, ranging from 38,410-42,130 arrests per month. ICE detentions and deportations are also tracked to have steady inclines in the time period, even among the governmental shutdown in September-November 2025. Next, by placing alongside Real GDP, Percent Change From Preceding Quarter from the *U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis* allows for a smooth observation of similarities. Real GDP is measured quarterly against seasonally adjusted annual rates, and usually takes longer to formulate. Despite this, the lowest amount of change occurred in Quarter 1 of 2025 and Quarter 4 of 2025 (approximately January-March and October-December). Q1 had a percent change of -1.0, and Q4 had a change of just over 1.0.

Conclusion

From this data, the lowest changes in real GDP correspond not only with the beginning of the Trump Administration’s planning of increased ICE Funding, but Quarter 4 falls in line with the height of the most immigration arrests. We can conclude that therefore, the United States GDP does have a correlation with the effects of the Immigration Customs and Enforcement’s searches and seizures. And, at the moment, it appears to be inversely correlated, meaning that when arrests increase, GDP change decreases.

Catching these steady yet noticeable trends are not only vital for recognizing the collateral damage the increase in ICE enforcement is doing to business and economics, but it allows the option for proper cushioning for the future. Just analyzing one side of a potential problem may not always be enough—comparing it can recognize the unintended consequences that are also occurring, and an administration—like the current Trump Administration—that does not do that risks economic, social, institutional, and even democratic downfall. Those who are working in the sector of finance and management should not be facing the issues that are coming with potentially dangerous political decisions. And, the United States earns its title for a reason, and it's because of the opportunity it offers to those who fight for a new and even better future. A strong, evidence-driven approach to politics that protects the rights and liberties of all working-class Americans can help protect our economic structure and our nation of opportunity.

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The “Cloud” Isn’t Weightless: Data Centers and Resource Politics in Colorado

4/24/2026 • By **Lou Stevens**

Since OpenAI's ChatGPT launched in November 2022, generative artificial intelligence, particularly large language models (LLMs), have become widely demanded across the globe, in what is termed the "AI Boom" (HISTORY.com Editors, 2025). As of July 2025, the widely popular ChatGPT received over 2.5 billion queries per day, with roughly 10% of the world's adult population using the platform (Adams, 2025). OpenAI represents only a part of the much broader AI market, alongside companies such as Google, Microsoft, Meta, and Anthropic. Taken together, the rise in artificial intelligence is disproportionate. By some estimates, AI-related hardware and software, including data centers, chip-making facilities, and new models and tools, accounted for around 1% of the United States' GDP growth in 2025 (Collyns, 2025).

AI's rapid growth represents a new political force generating conflicts over energy and water use. As governments try to grapple with climate change and enforce environmental policies, AI poses a fundamental challenge by introducing a resource-intensive industry that strains existing environmental policies. Governments face major tradeoffs between the economic benefits of AI and major localized environmental costs.

Perhaps the most evident and visible example comes in the form of data centers. Despite AI's digital nature, it requires vast amounts of physical infrastructure, particularly data centers to house large, complex algorithms. While data centers (places that store, process, and distribute digital data) are nothing new, as digital workloads increased during the 2010s, energy and water demand remained relatively constant due to technological advancements in cooling and hardware (Iman, 2025; Schmelzer, 2026). Unlike these stable trends, the disproportionate scale and rapid expansion of AI computing demands have surpassed the capabilities of current data center technology to manage land, energy, and water.

Hence, more data centers are needed to keep pace with technological advancements, and the United States, which houses a third of global data centers, is a major driving force (Iman, 2025). Yet, with data centers popping up, policymakers and residents are increasingly worried about their potential impacts on communities, such as higher utility rates and pollution.

For illustration, globally, data centers account for 1-2% of electricity use, about the energy usage of a country the size of Sweden or Argentina, and are "likely [to] reach 3%–4% by 2030" (Iman, 2025). In the United States, water used for data center cooling "is equivalent to the water consumption of a city of 3 million people" (Iman, 2025).



The rising energy and water demands are not just an abstract concept but are increasingly shaping local politics. Communities and policymakers nationwide are forced to balance tradeoffs between economic development and environmental stability.

In Colorado, a few companies have begun construction on data centers, prompting various responses from residents. Larimer and Logan Counties have enacted moratoriums to halt construction until state regulatory laws are enacted (Schmelzer, 2026). In 2026, Colorado lawmakers will vote on two bills, House Bill 26-1030 and Senate Bill 26-102, that propose radically different approaches to data centers. These bills will be another attempt to regulate this emerging industry.

HB 26-1030 proposes conditional tax breaks to data centers that meet certain requirements. In this way, the HB hopes to improve Colorado's competitiveness for AI data centers while limiting the environmental impacts and preventing higher household utility rates. To receive the bill's tax cuts (a 100% state sales and use tax exemption), the data center must invest \$250 million in the center, create high-paying jobs (110% of the county's average wage), use waterless cooling technology, and transition to renewable energy. Proponents argue that HB will attract high-wage jobs and invest in communities while still protecting scarce water resources and energy rates. By some estimates, tax breaks would decrease state revenue by "\$92.5 million in sales tax revenue in the first three years, assuming a total of 17 data centers would qualify for the tax breaks in that time period" (Schmelzer, 2026).

Alternatively, SB 26-102 proposes to enact high environmental standards and prohibits offering economic development rates to large data centers. Data centers will be required to report energy and water usage, and by 2031, all their annual energy consumption will be from renewables. The bill also prohibits utilities from offering economic development rates to large load data centers. Proponents say that data centers will pay the full incremental cost of infrastructure rather than passing higher rates onto individuals and small businesses. Further, it will allow Colorado to achieve or protect its current environmental goals that are threatened by data centers. Those opposed argue that this will drive data centers away from Colorado and question the overall bill structure. For example, requiring dry-cooling systems to save water, yet such cooling systems can lead to a 13% annual energy increase (Kapiloff et al., 2025).

While it is unlikely that either of these bills will pass in their current form, they do clearly illustrate competing interests between economic development and environmental protection. Yet, even if Colorado and other states attempt to drive data centers away, it is unlikely that these conflicts will remain regionally isolated. The increasing online nature of today's society and the rapid adoption of AI technologies have created a need for a place to house and process large amounts of digital data. Governments will likely continue to confront tradeoffs between attracting investment and managing environmental costs. Further, current environmental regulations will need to be updated to account for these new factors. Still, the politics surrounding AI infrastructure highlights a broader challenge to modern governance, one that has been highlighted since the introduction of the internet: how to regulate our evolving online world, whose material demands are often obscured by its very digital nature.

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CU BOULDER STUDENT FEATURE

Democracy in a Shuttlebox: Learned Helplessness in American Society4/24/2026 • By **Amelia Tatro**

More and more, Americans find themselves losing faith in the country's democracy. Regardless of political affiliation, it is no secret that the current political climate in the United States has become an object of disdain. Vast discontent with unstable leadership, noticeable underperformance on economic promises, and volatile global relations has fostered mass disillusionment among voters. Joshua Byers, a 26-year-old American, voted in the 2024 presidential election. He was convinced his voice would contribute to “lower prices and improve the lives of the working class” (Merica & Zakrzewski, 2026). Byers was interviewed recently, two years post-election, in a focus group of young voters outside Charlotte. His response: “I feel betrayed,” (Merica & Zakrzewski, 2026). This focus group revealed confusion regarding America’s current infatuation with international conflict and had many citizens “questioning why they voted in the first place” (Merica & Zakrzewski, 2026). Young Americans, who cast their vote just two years ago, are feeling disparaged by the political direction of the country. Exploited with promises of improvement, many citizens are left feeling hopeless and skeptical of their place in America’s democratic process.

“Learned helplessness” was a term coined in the late 1960s by J. Bruce Overmier, Martin Seligman, and Steven Maier. This behavioral phenomenon was tested via Pavlovian conditioning techniques by first administering inescapable shocks to a group of dogs. Eventually, these conditioned dogs and an unconditioned control group were placed in “a shuttle box, a two-sided chamber in which a dog jumps from one side to the other side to turn off or escape the shock” (Lennerlöf, 1988). Shocks can be entirely avoided if the jump to the other side occurs before the stimulation. While Overmier et al. quickly discovered the control group could actively avoid the adverse shock, the dogs who had initially been conditioned to an unavoidable shock would rather lie down and “accept the shock passively” (Lennerlöf, 1988). This conditioned group had developed uncertainty in their sense of control and refused to make any effort to avoid the adverse stimuli. This finding is evident in the political behavior intensifying in America.

“Learned helplessness” occurs when the feeling of control is removed. This pattern is programmed in one’s brain that no action can prohibit the inevitable adverse stimuli. This lack of control permeates into the ability to learn new, preventative behaviors, like jumping to the other side of the shuttle box. This fear and defeat can become trans-situational, where one instance of helplessness can infiltrate unrelated situations. Unforeseen, large-scale political decisions made by the American government

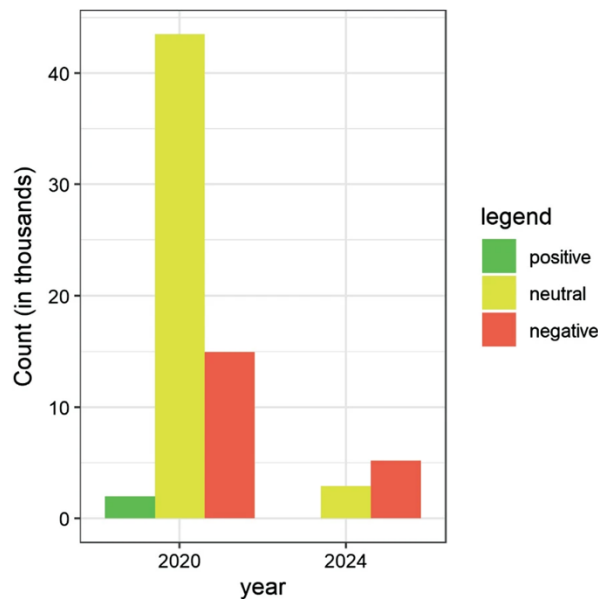


have instilled such a trans-situational lack of personal control. In his interview, Joshua Byers adds, “I don’t really want to vote anymore. I’m really starting to think it just won’t matter. ... I don’t want to feel responsible for taking a vote and feeling misled, or misjudged, or making a wrong move” (Merica & Zakrzewski, 2026). Americans have begun to welcome defeat as a result of recurring political shortcomings.

It is now understood that because of the regular use of technology to access social media, “we have round-the-clock access to the latest news,” and “having 24/7 access to current events means there’s potentially no limit to how much we consume” (Mental Health Foundation, n.d.). This access is novel to society as news was once limited to word of mouth, newspapers, magazines, radio transmissions, and eventually, television. Continuous coverage fueled by social media has exposed many Americans to more comprehensive and widespread media than ever before. This, in turn, amplifies outside stressors to trigger personal learned helplessness. It doesn't help that “the rapid spread of information blurs the line between truth and falsehood,” which works to create “a political information environment highly susceptible to misinformation” (Bano et al., 2025). The figure attached shows the “number of posts and reposts that were determined to contain misinformation by sentiment classification” (Bano et al., 2025). While it is recorded that the amount of misinformation has decreased from 2020, it is still notable that there is no recording of positive misinformation. This notable documentation of negative information concerning America's government only augments the volume of stressors and amplifies the level of disillusionment. The amalgamation of political discontent, mass media, and misinformation is stripping the agency from American democracy and has begun to operate as a human version of Pavlovian conditioning. One by one, irrespective of party, Americans are experiencing inescapable shock. And similarly, Americans have begun to adopt the defeatist mindset of the conditioned dogs.

Figure 1

From: Misinformation and Democratic Dissatisfaction: Trump's Electoral Narratives in the 2020 and 2024 US Elections



Number of posts and reposts that were determined to contain misinformation by sentiment classification

Citizens cannot merely prevent ongoing international war, nor can they simply correct America's economy in one day. However, citizens must remain diligent with their personal actions. Citizens' sense of control is being diluted, twisted into trans-situational cynicism of one's own locus of control. It is understood that "when an individual cannot control an aversive outcome, but believes that other relevant people can, the individual has to take the blame: the fault is attributed to internal factors" (Lennerlöf, 1988). Americans begin to lose their confidence in their ability to influence their outcomes, and citizens become the dog that just lies down.

However, America as a society is not helpless dogs in a shuttle box. It is true that "human beings who have experienced an uncontrollable situation tend afterwards to make fewer attempts when facing other problems" (Lennerlöf, 1988). Learned helplessness has begun silencing the people and has "fostered a political climate in which populist leaders can capitalize on public disillusionment," which has allowed these leaders and parties to "promote narratives that dismiss facts, exacerbate polarization, and hinder the implementation of comprehensive policies" (Bano et al., 2025). These large-scale issues, heightened and often distorted by mass media, should not be allowed to attack one's personal locus of control, steal one's optimism, or convince Americans that what is done as democratic citizens does not matter. It has been found that "to overcome learned helplessness, the individual must learn to change the way that they think, moving from feelings of helplessness to feelings of control" (Winterflood & Climie, 2020). Democracy is fueled by resilience, opinion, and differences. American citizens can cast a vote; they are free to protest, and their voices do matter. In a volatile political climate with extensive, brazen coverage, Americans must stand strong and remember that they do maintain control over their actions. A democracy can only function if Americans reframe their perception to combat disillusionment and exercise agency by being the dog that jumps to the other side.

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